

September 8, 2008

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 2135, the Child Soldiers Accountability Act of 2008. S. 2135 amends title 18 of the United States Code to create a criminal provision under U.S. law aimed at those who recruit or conscript children under the age of 15 into armed conflict. It establishes criminal penalties for up to 20 years in prison and up to life imprisonment if death results from the crime.

The bill also makes it a violation of immigration law for any person seeking admission to the United States to have committed such acts.

Finally, the bill would extend United States jurisdiction to perpetrators of this crime who are present in the United States, regardless of their nationality or where the crime takes place, so that those who commit these crimes cannot use this country as a safe haven from prosecution. This type of jurisdiction exists for similar crimes such as laws on torture and genocide, which allow for extraterritorial jurisdiction for crimes committed outside of the United States.

In at least 18 countries around the world, children are utilized as direct participants in war. Many of these children soldiers, some as young as 8 years old, are abducted or recruited by force and often compelled to follow orders to participate under harsh duress. And girls make up more than 30 percent of child soldiers and participate in many conflicts. Oftentimes, they are abused and raped. Once recruited, these children, boys and girls, participate in all forms of combat, even wielding AK-47s and M-16s as portrayed in the media.

There is international opposition to recruiting and using child soldiers. Over 110 countries, including the United States, have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits the recruitment and use of child soldiers under the age of 18. Nevertheless, the prevalence and nature of the child soldier problem is not going away. It continues to plague the international community. For example, in Uganda, the rebel group has abducted at least 20,000 children and has forced them to work as laborers, soldiers, and sex slaves. We hear about the ongoing persecution and atrocities in Burma, but what has escaped media attention is the use of child soldiers there, as the government has recruited up to 70,000 children, more than any other country in the world.

Recruiting and using child soldiers does not currently violate United States criminal law. S. 2135 was introduced by Senator *Durbin* and Senator *Coburn* to correct that problem. We overwhelmingly passed the Genocide Accountability Act last year to end the immunity gap in genocide law. By this bill, we seek to do the same thing for those who maliciously recruit and use innocent children in warfare. I urge my colleagues to support the bill.